Chapter 6. Conclusion

Extinction indicates a loss of life and a loss of relationships among living things. The extinction of a plant species is a process that has taken place in the past. The impact of this past happening has ramifications now and in the future. When we learn that a plant species is extinct we know intuitively that our future or the future of life has been diminished in some way. Extinction is a salient concept because it impinges on our vision of the future, and disrupts the security of our beliefs about eternity.

Art, according to Gadamer, contributes to the human pursuit of significance because it is ‘perhaps the only way of relating to eternity’. The chilling evidence of extinction presented in my visual work casts a shadow over our conception of the future and ultimately, of eternity. If art is valued as a way of relating to eternity, as Gadamer claims, then my visual work will be discomforting as it presents an aspect of reality that is less than ideal.

My representation of extinct plants in a beautiful form presses beauty into a subversive role. I have not employed beauty for the pleasure it brings, but instead as a means of, on the one hand generating connections and, on the other, indicating that connections with these plants have been extinguished. My aim in exploiting beauty has been to make this loss salient.

My work has made a contribution to the field of contemporary art by examining the role of beauty in both a theoretical and practical context. Furthermore, my art has tested the capacity of visual art to reveal information regarding the current escalation of extinction in Tasmania, to generate critical reflection and therefore, potentially to make a contribution to a greater understanding of the world.

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By providing a voice to the silence of extinction my art makes an appeal for us to walk more softly and with more care on the earth, and to preserve the diversity of extant life forms. It may encourage the viewers of the work to consider the extent to which people contribute to altering and thereby making nature.